

# Strengthening Teacher–Student Relationships

## Why go this route?

- “A fundamental question for a student is ‘Does my teacher like me?’ Given a rigorous, aligned curriculum, the answer to that simple question is our best predictor of student achievement.”  
—Alice Terry, *More Life Through Management*
- “The quality of teacher–student relationships is the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management.”  
—Marzano and Marzano, *Dimensions of Learning*
- “We can not teach students well if we do not know them well.”  
—Hoffman and Leak
- “A strong relationship with a caring adult enables at-risk youth to make life-altering changes.”  
—Werner and Smith, *Overcoming The Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*
- 80% of students entering schools feel good about themselves. By the end of 5th grade, only 20% do. Only one in five high school students has positive self- esteem.  
National Parent Teacher Association,  
National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1990.

## You’ll know you’ve arrived when...

- Your student survey data shows progress.
- Your classroom evaluations show that children believe you care.
- Your classroom attendance begins to improve.
- Your students and their parents are positively responsive to you and to your classroom environment.

## Construction Zone

### It’s about TIME

- Effective changes in practice will require deliberate time set aside throughout the school year for planning, data reflection, and professional development.
- Start by setting aside 1–2 hours in August for Steps 1–4.
- Plan 1–2 lessons in September for Steps 5–7.
- Use 20 minutes of your weekly planning time to plan ways to strengthen relationships, using ideas from Steps 8–12.


### Potential COSTS

- An outside professional development facilitator, if you choose, can cost \$500–\$1500 per day. You might consider these topics:
  - Differentiated learning.
  - Understanding children from poverty.
  - Professional development on diversity.

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## The Process

*A step-by-step guide  
to building relationships  
and creating a positive  
classroom environment.*

**NOTE:** Steps marked with a  are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

*Start the year by reading and reflecting on your own intentions.*

- 1 Read the characteristics of the “healing teacher”** in INSERT for Step 1. If they seem meaningful, cut out a set of cards so you can post a fresh one each morning where you’ll see it.
- 2 Experiment with the visioning exercise** in INSERT for Step 2 to propel your mind-set toward a vision of excellence for each of your students.
- 3 Use the Environmental Checklist** in INSERT for Step 3 to see if your classroom is welcoming to those with attention problems.
- 4 Use the checklist** “What the Teacher Does Makes a Difference” in INSERT for Step 4 to identify 1-2 changes you’re willing to initiate this year.

*Invest time during the first two weeks of school in individualizing relationships with your students.*

- 5 Get to know your students personally** by using a questionnaire or an exercise from INSERTS for Step 5 (A-D). Refer to the information to be sensitive to their needs, interests and concerns.
- 6 Get acquainted with the learning styles of your students** and their dominant intelligences. INSERT A for Step 6 offers a self-description tool based on Gardner’s “Multiple Intelligences.” Or see a temperament-based way to introduce our preferences to each other in MI-Map Packet 5:1 “Know Your Students.” Tally the surveys. Use Insert B for Step 6 for scoring.
- 7 Begin to draw upon resources** which will help you to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse learning styles in your classroom. See the Resource page for recommended books on the back.

*Begin to implement a “conspiracy of caring” in your classroom.*

- 8 Pick a new strategy** from INSERT for Step 8 to add to your weekly routine.
  - 9 Reach out** to your “Sensate Learners.” See INSERT for Step 9.
  - 10 Identify your students’ gifts.** See INSERT for Step 10.
  - 11 Help students build a Board of Directors.** See INSERT for Step 11.
  - 12 Expand your understanding of how to work with children** from poverty. See recommended books on the back Resource page.
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## Getting more mileage from attention to classroom culture

*How creating a positive classroom environment benefits your school in regard to the following initiatives:*

### **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

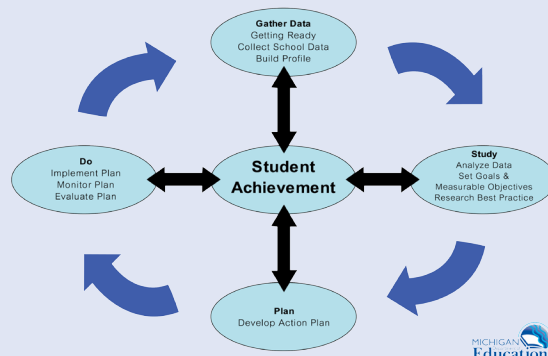
- ESEA requires deliberate strategies and continuous improvement toward helping more and more of our children succeed. For educators like those quoted on the front page of this packet, setting a positive tone for the school may be precisely the “strategy” needed to boost student achievement. If your staff believes that to be the case for your school, then working systematically to make a difference in that tone is a legitimate ESEA strategy. Write it into your school improvement plan and take accountability for doing it as seriously as other “hard-edged” strategies.

### **State Accreditation System**

- A staff that is setting goals and systematically working to influence culture/climate is a great indicator of engagement. Cite research like the sources we suggest to tie this work to student achievement and use this as evidence.

### **Michigan Continuous School Improvement Process (Mi-CSI)**

#### **Michigan School Improvement Framework**



Consider parent, student, teacher, and community perception of your classroom culture to build the “optimal learning environment”. This packet will assist the school staff in its quest to develop the learning environment the students deserve.



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## Resources

### *Books, Articles, Websites*

#### **Teaching with Love and Logic**

Fay, Jim. New York: Love and Logic Press, 1998.

Read this work and discover new practical techniques for disciplining students and for gaining student cooperation.

#### **A Framework for Understanding Children from Poverty**

Payne, Ruby. aha! Process Inc., 2001.

This book outlines the hidden rules of economic class and specific strategies for overcoming obstacles of poverty. It is filled with case studies, personal stories and observations which are relevant reading for educators who care about children in poverty.

#### **The Healing Curriculum**

Gary Phillips. The National School Improvement Project. P.O Box 1234 Issaquah, WA 98027.

This resource is FILLED with creative ideas for reaching and relating to reluctant learners and students who need healing.

#### **The Differentiated Classroom**

Tomlinson, Carol Ann. ASCD. Alexandria, Virginia, 1999.

Here the reader learns to differentiate instruction for all levels of students in a classroom. By using the strategies, you as a teacher will better reach and support different learning styles, leading to stronger classroom

#### **Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools.**

Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde. Heinemann, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1998.

This book introduces the reader to research on teaching strategies designed to engage students and to enrich instruction in reading, writing, math, science, social studies and the arts.

Find tools for organizing formal class meetings at:

[www.responsiveclassroom.org](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org)

#### **The Center for Improving School Culture**

[www.schoolculture.net](http://www.schoolculture.net)

### *People*

Intermediate School Districts/RESAs can serve as a resource.

#### **For more information, contact:**

Michigan Department of Education

Office of Education  
Improvement and Innovation  
517-241-3147

School Improvement Unit  
517-373-8480

Curriculum and Instruction Unit  
517-241-4285

Office of Assessment  
and Accountability  
517-373-0048

Office of Early Childhood  
and Family Services  
517-241-3592

Office of Field Services  
517-373-3921

Office of Professional Preparation  
and Teacher Certification  
517-373-6505

Office of Special Education  
and Early Intervention Services  
517-373-9433

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